

The DMH-VPP Clinical Research Assessment Practicum

***A Correctional Assessment and Research Practicum Focused on
Risk Estimation***

**Brochure
2012-2013 Training Year**

**Department of Mental Health—Vacaville Psychiatric Program
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Department of Mental Health—Vacaville Psychiatric Program

Description

The Department of Mental Health—Vacaville Psychiatric Program (DMH—VPP) psychology service is pleased to offer a practicum experience to interested graduate students. This research practicum offers students experience with a wide variety of clinical assessments with a specialized population (inpatients within a correctional setting) while participating in formal research protocols.

The research practicum is designed to offer training to students in assessment and applied research, while supporting the overall mission of the hospital. The mission of DMH-VPP is to provide a high quality of care to patients referred from the California Department of Corrections (CDCR) for inpatient mental health care. The mission of the research program at DMH—VPP is to provide an empirical basis to DMH and CDCR for how suicide and violence risk estimations are made, and to further provide information on culturally competent methods for assessing risk. In addition, the research program seeks to find ways to improve interventions with some of the highest risk patients in the hospital (e.g., patients with multiple past suicide attempts, patients with histories of serial murder, etc.).

Practicum students help to support these research efforts. Practicum students work within a ‘research center’ like-environment, where senior staff members mentor pre- and post-doctoral trainees, pre- and post-doctoral trainees take on increasing research roles and responsibilities, and practicum students receive supervision from staff and mentoring from pre- and post doctoral trainees.

Current Projects

Suicide Risk Assessment Study (Horon, McManus): This protocol evaluates the use of standardized suicide risk measures and experimental suicide risk measures with correctional patients. The study seeks to establish reliability and validity of these measures within the correctional setting. In addition, the study compares patient results on these measures with historical variables (e.g. number of prior attempts, lethality of prior attempts, trauma history, and neurological history) and criminological variables (e.g. offense history) to develop predictive models regarding suicidal potential. More than 375 patients have participated in this study thus far.

Violence Risk Assessment Study (Horon, McManus): This protocol evaluates the relative weight of different assessment areas in explaining violence potential. The study compares individuals who are violent in community and institutional settings with those who are violent only in one setting (e.g. only in the community) with those without a history of violence. The Violence Risk Assessment Study includes the administration of traditional violence risk measures along with measures of impulsivity and reaction to provocation, diagnostic measures, and a battery of neuropsychological tests. The study seeks to develop a predictive model for

capturing violence risk potential whether the source of risk is predatory, reactive/impulsive, or based on cognitive impairment.

Personality Characteristics of Serial Murderers (Rohrer, Bettger): This study the newest addition to DMH VPP's research. The protocol uses objective and projective personality measures to better understand the personality functioning of serial murderers. This pilot study is currently collecting a small sample from which to describe group demographic, criminological, and personality characteristics. It is hoped that eventually the data will identify target interventions for treating these individuals while housed in DMH-VPP.

Duties of Practicum Students

Daily activities for practicum students include:

- Interviewing patients for the purpose of gaining informed consent for research participation
- Administering suicide risk assessment inventories
- Conducting semi-structured suicide risk interviews and coding interviews
- Administering traditional violence risk assessment inventories
- Administering a battery of neuropsychological instruments
- Administering a battery of diagnostic measures and measures of impulsivity/reactivity
- Data coding and data entry
- Conducting archival data searches
- Observing, assisting, and/or conducting objective or projective personality measures
- Conducting literature reviews
- Preparing professional posters and presentations.

Ambitious students may also be involved in collaborating with staff and/or post-doctoral fellows on professional manuscripts. There may be opportunities to work on independent or pilot projects as well.

Presentation Requirement

All practicum students are required to present at an annual symposium on suicide and violence risk at DMH-VPP. Students are therefore responsible to learn related research literature and to prepare a collaborative scholarly presentation by February of the training year. Students will work with current pre-doctoral interns, postdoctoral fellows, and staff members in preparing their presentations.

Practicum students are highly encouraged to develop posters or to present at additional scholarly meetings during the training year.

Relationship with PAU

The DMH—VPP research practicum meets all PAU requirements for practicum placements. Each week, students receive an hour of individual supervision from a licensed psychologist and two hours of group supervision/didactic training weekly. Group supervision incorporates didactic training on a case-by-case basis as well as on an aggregate basis. Group supervision is conducted by the Principal Investigator of each study and/or Co-Investigators involved in at least one study. In addition, practicum students are proctored by pre-doctoral interns and postdoctoral fellows at DMH-VPP. DMH—VPP's pre-doctoral internship is APA-accredited.

Application Requirements

The application deadline for our research practicum is **2/13/12**. Completed applications must be received at the close of business (5:00 p.m.) on the deadline day. Completed applications include the following:

- A cover letter with statement of interest
- A Curriculum Vitae
- Two letters of recommendation
- A completed DMH-VPP Research Practicum Application
- An Assessment Measures Checklist

Please send these materials via e-mail attachment to robert.horon@vpp.dmh.ca.gov

Alternatively, materials post-marked by 2/13/12 may be mailed to:

Attn: Robert Horon, Ph.D.,
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Vacaville, CA 95696-2297

Questions can be directed by e-mail or phone (707-453-7028).

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